

Non-Provisional Patent Application Under 35 U.S.C. § 111(a) and 37 C.F.R. § 1.53(b)
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for

**METHOD OF AUTOMATIC STANDARDIZED CALIBRATION
FOR INFRARED SENSING DEVICE**

by

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5 This application claims the benefit of an earlier filed copending provisional patent application titled "REMOTELY MANAGED AUTOMATIC DISPENSING APPARATUS AND METHOD," Application No. 60/242,898, filed October 24, 2000, the disclosure of which is hereby incorporated by reference.

1. Field of Invention

15 particularly to the automatic standardized calibration of infrared detection devices.

Various methods have been employed to electronically control water flow through a water control device such as a faucet or spigot. Among the accepted and conventional methods is the use of an optical sensor for detecting reflections from an infrared (“IR”) source or IR emitter. When processing electronics determine the reflection has exceeded a threshold value, a control signal opens a solenoid valve. Generally speaking, a pulsed IR beam is reflected from an object (such as a user’s hands) and sensed to determine whether to activate or deactivate a solenoid valve to control water flow from the water control device. Pulsed IR sensing remains at the forefront of sensing techniques used with these types of devices due in part to its reasonable performance and low cost.

Because of variations in processing circuits, emitter characteristics and sensor characteristics, it is necessary to calibrate the IR system. Calibration of infrared sensing devices such as, for example, automatically activated flow control devices is labor intensive and

inefficient with respect to devices presently on the market. The lost cost IR sensing devices employed in automatically activated flow control devices vary with respect to power requirements, performance, and other criteria. As a result, readings taken by these IR sensing units (such as whether a user's hands are present beneath the aerator of a faucet) are generally non-uniform from device to device, and therefore often result in improper activation and deactivation of some devices. Similarly, as battery power for these devices decreases over time, so does the power output of the IR sensing devices. Moreover, water droplets sprayed or otherwise deposited on or near the IR detector lens or lens cover have been known to cause such devices to malfunction. As a result, manual calibration of conventional infrared sensing systems of automatically activated flow control devices is generally required during initial installation, and thereafter on a frequent basis following extended periods of use.

Most infrared sensing units have an IR emitter and IR detector embedded in an electronics board in the collar of a faucet. During manufacturing, each emitter and detector has to be screened, requiring technicians to manually adjust settings when they go through calibration steps. A technician is required to make measurements and adjustments to the main electronics board which is time consuming and costly.

SUMMARY OF INVENTION

The present invention provides a method for calibrating infrared detecting devices which detect the presence of an object by detecting an IR reflection. The output of the IR detector is calibrated by a control module which receives the output of the IR detector and regulates the output of the IR emitter. A single standard pair of an IR detector and an IR emitter is sufficient to calibrate an unlimited number of control modules. The method eliminates the need to manually calibrate and adjust each IR detector and IR emitter that is part of the infrared detecting device. The method uses a standard IR detector and IR emitter with output characteristics in the middle of a suitable operating range. The control module activates the IR emitter with an input value to emit IR radiation which is reflected from a standard object at a standard distance from the IR emitter to an IR detector which is also a standard distance from the

object. The output from the IR detector is transmitted to a control module. If the IR detector output is out of the desired range, a calibration manager directs the signal processor to increase or decrease the output of the IR emitter. This process is repeated until the output of the IR detector is within midrange. The value of the corresponding input to the IR emitter to achieve this midrange output value of the IR detector is stored in the nonvolatile memory of the control module and the calibration manager reprograms itself to use this calibration value of input to the IR emitter as a reference standard.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is an exemplary embodiment of a fluid dispensing system in accordance with the present invention.

Fig. 2 is a block diagram illustrating the fluid dispensing system depicted in Fig. 1.

Fig. 3 is a flow chart illustrating the architecture and functionality of an infrared detection system depicted in Figs. 1 and 2.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

While the following description details the preferred embodiments of the present invention, it is to be understood that the invention is not limited in its application to the details of construction and arrangement of the parts illustrated in the accompanying drawings, since the invention is capable of other embodiments and of being practiced in various ways.

Figs. 1 and 2 show a fluid dispensing system that employs an infrared detection system 9 in accordance with the present invention. As shown in Fig. 1, the fluid dispensing system 8 includes an automated faucet 10. Automated faucet 10 has plumbing 11 in line with a solenoid valve 12 and a mixing valve 13, which is connected to a hot water source 14 and a cold water

source 15. Faucet 10 also has IR emitter 16 and IR detector 17 on a sensor board in a collar 18 around faucet 10. The sensor board is preferably connected electrically to control module 19 by connector 20. The connector 20 provides IR emitter 16 and IR detector 17 interface to module 19. Control module 19 output is also connected electrically to solenoid 12 by connector 21.

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In the example shown by Fig. 1 the calibration manager 38 (see Fig. 2) in control module 19 controls the intensity and duration of each pulse emitted from IR emitter 16. When a user places his or her hands near faucet 10, the emitted IR radiation is reflected from the hands to IR detector 17. IR detector 17 sends an output to calibration manager 38 which may then signal solenoid controller 40 (see Fig. 2) to open solenoid valve 12 so that water will flow out of faucet 10. When the user removes his or her hands from faucet 10, the absence of sufficiently detected IR radiation signals control module 19 to close or deactivate solenoid 12.

To insure proper operation it is desirable to calibrate the IR emitter 16, IR detector 17, associated circuitry amplifiers 30 and 31, and signal processor 34. This may be performed during manufacturing and heretofore has required manual calibration. In accordance with the present invention, calibration can now be performed automatically by the calibration manager 38 using electronic or software methodology or a combination thereof.

Fig. 2 shows the components of an infrared detecting device used in the calibration procedure for the present invention. Sensor board 22 in collar 18 has IR emitter 16 and IR detector 17 which are connected to IR emitter amp 30 and IR detector amp 31, respectively. Control module 19 has a power supply 33 which provides power to a signal processor 34, a programmable memory 35 with computing capability, a solenoid power source 36, and a solenoid switch 37. Memory 35 also has a calibration manager 38, calibration data 39, and solenoid controller 40. The solenoid switch 37 under the control of solenoid controller 40, can open solenoid valve 12. There are at least two programs in memory 35, one in solenoid controller 40 for turning the faucet 10 on and off, and the other in calibration manager 38 for calibrating the outputs of IR emitter 16 and IR detector 17 during manufacture and during commercial use. If desired, control module 19 may communicate with a remote computer 39 so that computer 39 can remotely monitor the memory 35 for computing capability and calibration

values obtained during a calibration procedure. Computer 39 typically is adapted to use any of the known operating systems and comprises a processor, random access memory, read only memory, disk drives, display, communications applications, and the like. The value of outputs produced by the IR detector and IR emitter will have optimal or standard ranges in which the infrared detecting device can operate satisfactorily. These predetermined maximum and minimum output ranges and the midpoint of these output ranges can be entered into calibration data 39 in memory 35. The infrared detection and calibration system 9 includes sensor board 22, memory 35, and signal processor 34.

Calibration manager 38 is configured to direct signal processor 34 to send an appropriate input signal to IR emitter amp 30 to cause IR emitter 16 to emit a given amount of infrared radiation. This radiation is detected by IR detector 17 and an input signal is thereby sent to IR detector amp 31 which then sends an amplified output signal to signal processor 34. Signal processor 34 then transmits this output signal to calibration manager 38. Calibration manager 38 is further configured to evaluate this output signal based on a standard range of values contained in calibration data 39 and thereby execute appropriate commands to signal processor 34 regarding input signals to IR emitter 16 to emit infrared radiation, or to solenoid controller 40 to direct signal processor to open or close solenoid valve 12.

Fig. 3 shows a method of the present invention for calibrating the IR emitter 16 and IR detector 17 with connected circuitry in control module 19 during manufacture or during commercial use. The present methodology employed in the IR detection system 9 requires the use of a selected pair consisting of a single IR emitter and a single IR detector which serves as a standard for calibrations of multiple control modules. This selected pair may be thought of as a golden standard. In the example of the automatic faucet, it may be considered a standard or "golden" collar 18, as shown in Fig. 1. The standard collar is connected to a control module 19 to conduct a calibration reflection test. Typically, in this test, a white card is placed a given distance from the IR emitter 16, simulating the hands of a user, for example.

Prior to activation of IR emitter 16 by control module 19, IR detector 16 will detect background IR radiation. In addition, when IR emitter 16 is activated by control module 19,

control module 19 provides an input signal to IR emitter 16 whereby IR emitter 16 produces an infrared signal or pulse (IR radiation) having an amplitude based on this input signal. In the absence of the IR emitter energy, some IR radiation may reflect back from other surrounding surfaces. This background and randomly reflected IR radiation (sometimes referred to as
5 “ambient infrared radiation”) is detected, measured, and can be used to make a correction for reflected IR radiation from the white card (or user’s hands), by calibration manager 38 in memory 35 of control module 19 (step 43). The reflection test is then initiated by calibration manager 38 in memory 35 of control module 19. Calibration manager 38 directs signal processor 34 to activate IR emitter 16 to emit a known amount of IR radiation, which is reflected
10 from the white card to the IR detector 17. IR detector 17 thereby sends an output signal to the signal processor 34, the strength or amplitude of the output signal being proportional to the strength of the detected infrared radiation (step 44).

The signal processor 34 sends the IR detector output signal to control manager 38 in
15 memory 35 of control module 19 which determines whether the output signal is within the predetermined range or near the approximate midpoint within the predetermined range of standard values contained in calibration data 39 (step 45). If not, control module 19, through signal processor 34, increases or decreases the output of the IR emitter by increasing or decreasing the output of IR emitter amp 30 a desired increment (step 46) by sending an appropriate input signal
20 to said IR emitter amp 30 and, hence, to IR emitter 16. The reflection test is then repeated until the IR detector output is within the predetermined range, preferably near the midrange (steps 44, 45, 46). Correction can be made to the detector output value, if desired, by subtracting randomly reflected IR generated output from the detector output generated by reflection from the white card.

If the IR detector output is within the predetermined range or at or near the midrange, the value of the IR emitter input that generated the satisfactory IR detector output is measured by said signal processor 34 and is sent from said signal processor 34 to calibration data 39 where the input value is stored permanently in nonvolatile memory (step 47). Calibration manager 38
30 is configured to then reprogram itself and thereafter to generate an emitter input signal based on the stored value until the next recalibration (step 48).

With the standardized calibration method of the present invention a single golden collar comprising one emitter/detector pair can be used to calibrate an unlimited number of control modules 19. The calibration occurs in the calibration manager 38 in memory 35 of control module 19, electronically or with software, or a combination thereof. This method, accordingly, facilitates the manufacture and maintenance of infrared detection devices by avoiding the need to manually calibrate the IR detector and/or the IR emitter that are manufactured with each control module 19.

The foregoing description has been limited to specific embodiments of this invention. It will be apparent, however, that variations and modifications may be made by those skilled in the art to the disclosed embodiments of the invention, with the attainment of some or all of its advantages and without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention. For example, inputs to IR emitter 16 or outputs from IR detector 17 may be measured in current or voltage. Various types of IR emitters and/or detectors may be employed to implement the IR emitter 16 and/or the IR detector 17 of the present invention. Sensor board 22 may have other structural features contained therein, such as a microprocessor or an IRDA photodiode for diagnostic and maintenance functions, or a power supply and power source. IR emitter amp 30 is contained in control module 19, but could be contained in sensor board 22. Control module 19 may have any suitable type of microprocessor or computer to perform programming, software implementation, and data storage and memory. The control module may use an AC source of power instead of batteries. The white card may be replaced by any desired object for reflecting emitted infrared radiation.

It will be understood that various changes in the details, materials, and arrangements of the parts which have been described and illustrated above in order to explain the nature of this invention may be made by those skilled in the art without departing from the principle and scope of the invention as recited in the following claims.